

# **Account of Purley on Thames**

## **Richard New**

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*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 50 published in PPN May 1985*

### 50 - RICHARD NEW, (1769-1839) - Labourer of Purley

Richard New's story is particularly interesting because his name appears so often in many different records. He first caught my attention during the reconstitution of the Purley Parish Registers. Anyone who has undertaken this sort of task will know that, sooner or later, some people begin to stand out as "characters" and Richard was one of those.

Baptised in Sulham in 1769, Richard New was the 5th of 6 children born to William and Martha. He seems to have grown up in part of a converted farmhouse known as Widleys (Wigleys) which lay on the border of Tidmarsh with North Street. He was working in Purley by March 1794 when he served on a Coroner's Jury. By December he was in Tidmarsh where, as a 25-year-old bachelor, he married Mary Dench. She was 26, had been baptised in Purley, and already had two illegitimate children. They had three daughters, the first born within six months of their marriage was baptised in Tidmarsh.

They had returned to Purley by 1797 and the following year Richard was appointed Tithingman and Hayward for the parish: this was a good move on his part as it ensured that he had a settlement in Purley and could become a charge on the parish poor rate if necessary. After serving his year's office he then refused to pay the statutory penny essoin (fine) for non-attendance at the Court.

His first wife died after 10 years marriage and Richard remained a widower for the next five years. At 45 years old he took a new bride in Purley: Fanny Lukeman, an illegitimate daughter of Sarah from Purley, was only 19. The couple called their banns in June 1810, were married in October and baptised their first child four months later. Altogether they had 12 children and were married for 29 years. During this period they had cause to be glad of Richard's settlement as the parish paid for the midwife, the burial of their children, payments during times of illness and then "bread money" - better known as

the wage supplement given under the Speenhamland System. The New Poor Law Guardians in 1835 soon put a stop to all that and Richard and Fanny were left to struggle on until they died in the parish in 1839 and 1841 respectively: he was 70 and she was only 50 years old.

This is just a brief summary of a life that in many ways was humdrum. His morals, and those of his neighbours seem somewhat lax. He seems always to have been poor and obtained work when he could as an agricultural labourer of no stated skill, but in many ways he was typical of others of the time.

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